# The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework: A Pragmatic Tool for Army Design

**A Monograph**

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**AY 2010-02**

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved*
*OMB No. 074-0188*



| 1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank) | 2. REPORT DATE | 3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED |
|---|---|---|
| | 02 DEC 2010 | SAMS Monograph 19 JAN 2010 – 02 DEC 2010 |

**4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE**
THE INTERAGENCY CONFLICT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK: A PRAGMATIC TOOL FOR U.S. ARMY DESIGN

**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**

**6. AUTHOR(S)**
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**7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)**

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**

**9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)**

**10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**

**11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE**

**13. ABSTRACT *(Maximum 200 Words)***

In October 2008, an interagency committee officially adopted the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) as the conceptual tool which informs interagency planning for conflict prevention, mitigation and stabilization. Because the Army is increasing its practice of deploying more planners to support interagency planning while also involving more interagency partners in its planning, this demonstrates the need to examine ICAF methodology in order to determine its compatibility with and utility within Army doctrinal planning processes.

By way of extensive literature reviews and comparative analysis, this study will establish that the ICAF and Army design have considerable differences but also share many similar systems thinking perspectives. The comparative analysis reveals that the ICAF, while compatible with design, is incomplete. This monograph will recommend that the two methodologies are compatible and integrating the ICAF with Army design can be advantageous in establishing a useful interagency approach to learning and understanding the nature of conflict and the context in which it exists or might emerge.

| 14. SUBJECT TERMS | 15. NUMBER OF PAGES |
|---|---|
| Complexity; Interagency; Conflict Assessment; Design | 50 |
| | 16. PRICE CODE |

| 17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT | 18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE | 19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT | 20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unclassified | Unclassified | Unclassified | 200 Words |

# SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

## MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

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Title of Monograph: The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework: A Pragmatic Tool for U.S. Army Design

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# Abstract

THE INTERAGENCY CONFLICT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK: A PRAGMATIC TOOL FOR U.S. ARMY DESIGN by Major Anthony B. Poole, United States Army, 50 pages.

A common perspective among U.S. interagency partners today is that any step towards more effective and coordinated responses to contemporary security challenges requires an improved and shared understanding of the nature of the conflict and the environment in which it exists or may potentially emerge. They also agree that this requires both a joint interagency process for conducting the assessment and a common conceptual framework to guide the collection and analysis of information. In October 2008, an interagency committee officially adopted the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) as the conceptual tool which informs interagency planning for conflict prevention, mitigation and stabilization. Because the Army is increasing its practice of deploying more planners to support interagency planning while also involving more interagency partners in its planning, this demonstrates the need to examine ICAF methodology in order to determine its compatibility with and utility within Army doctrinal planning processes.

In March 2010, design was officially introduced into Army doctrine as a new conceptual planning component complementing detailed planning. It is a meta-perspective approach that provides military leaders with advanced cognitive tools to address complex, ill-structured problems common to contemporary conflict operations. By way of extensive literature reviews and comparative analysis, this study will establish that the ICAF and Army design have considerable differences but also share many similar systems thinking perspectives. The comparative analysis reveals that the ICAF, while compatible with design, is incomplete. This monograph will recommend that the two methodologies are compatible and integrating the ICAF with Army design can be advantageous in establishing a useful interagency approach to learning and understanding the nature of conflict and the context in which it exists or might emerge.

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# Introduction

"The historian of great events is always oppressed by the difficulty of tracing the silent, subtle influences, which in all communities precede and prepare the way for violent outbursts and uprisings."

– Winston Churchill, 1898

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush issued a new National Security Strategy (NSS) that described a 21st century security environment that was comprehensively novel to any previous period in the nation's history. The President's description of the strategic environment reflected shifting post-Cold War global trends that were fundamentally reshaping the world we thought we understood. The forces of globalization, the rise of new regional economic and political powers, booming urban populations and unrestrained access to massive surpluses of weapons worldwide were all contributing to compounding the complexity of existing and emerging threats to America's national security at home and abroad. The threat of conquering states were becoming less than those posed by failing ones and the menace of great fleets and armies were being reduced compared to the dangers of emerging non-state actors and global shadow networks. [1] The 2002 NSS affirmed that combating irregular/non-state threats, breeding in failed or failing states around the globe, were going to be permanent features shaping future conflict in the 21st century. To respond to these new challenges, the United States would pursue a prevention-based strategy aimed at defeating conventional and unconventional threats outright, deterring state sponsors of terrorism and convincing global actors who exploit terror that they will not succeed.[2]

Four years later in his 2006 NSS, President Bush re-affirmed that future conflicts would continue to be characterized by combating irregular and non-state actors in failing states or

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[1] *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 2002), 1-3.

[2] Ibid., 5-6.

ungoverned spaces and would involve their use of irregular methods of warfare to counter America's overwhelming military power.[3] Expanding upon his prevention based strategy introduced in 2002, the President's 2006 NSS called for the U.S. to pursue three levels of engagement to address these types of regional contingencies: conflict prevention, conflict intervention and post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction.[4] For these types of engagements or operations, the U.S. would employ all elements of national power in order to improve security situations, stabilize economies, assist in the transition of government institutions and provide reconstruction or developmental support to areas devastated by years of war and neglect.[5] The strategy also calls for improving the capacity of U.S. agencies to plan, prepare, coordinate, integrate, and execute responses covering the full range of crisis associated with these types of engagements.[6] In order to accomplish this, the U.S. would have to build stronger civilian and military partnerships and improve upon their processes to collaborate on solutions to address the conventional and emerging threats that transcend the scope and authority of any one agency.[7]

Contrary to the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies, some arguments cite that the unpredictable nature of future security challenges described here are not inherently new and the need to improve interagency cooperation has been a common struggle for successive administrations since World War II.[8] Despite these arguments, there is general consensus among national security professionals that the renewed efforts by the White House, Congress,

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[3] *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 2006), 19.

[4] Ibid., 15.

[5] Ibid., 16.

[6] Ibid., 45.

[7] Gene Dodaro, *United States Government Accountability Office Report 10-395CG, Maximizing DOD's Potential to Face New Fiscal Challenges and Strengthen Interagency Partnerships* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, January 2010), 2.

[8] Bernard Carreau, *Case Studies in Defense Transformation, Number 6, Transforming the Interagency System for Complex Operations* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2007), 1.

Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State (State), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to reform America's national security architecture is certainly necessary and can be attributed to the milieu of socio-political setbacks in both Iraq and Afghanistan.[9] They also agree that the U.S. can expect to encounter similar challenges, analogous to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the unforeseen courses of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, in future engagements.[10] The need for improving the interagency system is also necessary considering the expanding scope and complexity accompanied with security tasks associated with a U.S. prevention based security strategy that demands far greater levels of contextual understanding beyond traditional methodologies the U.S. military and its interagency partners have been accustomed to. The measures required to conduct asymmetrical, interagency approaches to counter the adaptive nature of future threats, often associated with or operating freely within failing states, continue to be a heavy topic of debate among America's national security institutions.[11]

The U.S. can expect that uncertainty, ambiguity and surprise will dominate the course of future regional and global events.[12] Globalization, increasing urban populations, declining natural resources, diminishing controls over weapons of mass destruction, and climate change each

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[9] Carreau, *Case Studies in Defense Transformation*, 17. James R. Locher, III, "The Most Important Thing: Legislative Reform of the National Security System," *Military Review Special Edition* (June 2008): 19.

[10] Department of Defense, Defense Science Board, *2004 Summer Study on Transition to and From Hostilities* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, 2004), 3.

[11] Numerous studies document the need to improve U.S. government interagency cooperation to address future security challenges. Among the best accounts are *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era, Phase 2 Report* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic Studies Institute, 2005) written by Clark Murdock and Michel Flournoy; Department of Defense, Defense Science Board, *2004 Summer Study on Transition to and From Hostilities* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, 2004) and U.S. Government Accountability Office Report 08-228T, *Stabilization and Reconstruction: Actions Needed to Improve Government-wide Planning and Capabilities for Future Operations* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, 2007).

[12] U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*, *First Draft Revision* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009), 1-4.

presents a number of dangerous trends that may interact in an intricate number of ways leading to uncertainty for predicting what emergent forms conflict will take. This is what makes trying to prepare to for the "unknown" and develop national security measures to effectively manage it such a daunting task for the defense community. In their book *Harnessing Complexity*, Robert Axelrod and Michael Cohen describe these types of environments as complex adaptive systems where such systems challenge both understanding as well as prediction.[13] The military's Joint Operating Concept appears to appreciate this type of systems perspective when it describes the current security environment as a "complex interactive environment in which events are largely unpredictable and sometimes counterintuitive."[14]

Owing to the difficulty of addressing the systemic complexity and adaptivity of the strategic challenges posed to U.S. national security institutions, the military and its U.S. government agency partners share the perspective that the first step towards a more effective and coordinated response to any contemporary conflict requires the development of a better and shared understanding of the nature of the environment in which it exists or may potentially emerge.[15] They also agree that achieving a shared understanding of the dynamics of a particular crisis requires both a joint interagency process for conducting the assessment and a common conceptual framework to guide the collection and analysis of information.

The military and USG agency institutions have been working towards this common goal for nearly a decade. Both have similarly experimented with systems thinking for several decades

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[13] Robert Axelrod and Michael Cohen, *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1999), xi.

[14] *CCJO v3.0*, 2.

[15] *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations, First Draft Revision*, IV-4; Cynthia Irmer, "A Systems Approach and the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF)," in *The Cornwallis Group XIV Workshop: Analysis of Societal Conflict and Counter-Insurgency* (Vienna, Austria: The Cornwallis Group, 2009), http://www.thecornwallisgroup.org/workshop_2009.php (accessed 22 May 22, 2010).

and adopted the practice into their organizational development models since the early 1990s.[16] The post-September 11, 2001 environment accelerated their interests in systems thinking, and its contributions have been prominent subjects of many debates involved in military and U.S. government agency transformation endeavors. To their benefit, the field of systems science has made significant advancements in systems thinking over the past forty years that provide the theoretical foundation for alternative cognitive approaches the military and its USG agency partners have adopted and continue to explore for addressing contemporary security challenges.

The aim of this monograph is to compare the two most recent theoretical constructs developed by the military and its interagency partners – U.S. Army design and the Department of State (DoS) Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) – in order to exploit their utility for improving interagency processes for collecting and synthesizing information leading to the development of "better and shared understanding" of complex conflict environments. Army design and the ICAF both propose a methodology that produces a holistic frame for learning about and understanding the operational environment. While Army design adopts a meta-perspective approach and does not commit to any specific framework, the primary question driving this study is to determine the potential benefit of integrating the two methodologies for what may prove to be a very useful interagency approach to learning about human complex adaptive systems. Because the Army is increasing its practice of using more USG interagency

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[16] In 1991 the U.S. Army War College hosted a conference on strategic leadership. At that conference, aspects of strategic leadership were being evaluated against Elliot Jacques's Stratified System Theory (SST.) The influence of SST, its emphasis on improving senior leader capabilities to deal with "cognitive complexity," becomes evident through the 1990s and early 2000s as systems thinking begins to permeate Army leadership and operations literature. Leonard Wong, Stephan Gerras, William Kidd, Robert Pricone, Richard Swengros, "Strategic Leadership Competencies," U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute Research Paper (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College), 3; Elliot Jaques, *Requisite Organization* (Arlington, VA: Cason Hall, 1989). USG agencies have been following systems thinking literature since the early 1970s. It is not until 1994 that the postmodern paradigm where human relational dynamics begins to be associated with the transformation of organizations, policies and processes. R. Jennings, "Participatory Development as a New Paradigm: The Transition of Development Professionalism," U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *USAID Community Based Reintegration and Rehabilitation in Post Conflict Settings* (Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2000), 1.

partners as proximate designers, or conversely, the Army is deploying planners to support USG interagency planning, the utility of integrating the two methodologies may also prove useful for establishing a cohesive interagency framework that establishes a common lexicon and operational praxis leading to more effective coordinated responses to contemporary conflicts.

## Methodology

The monograph is organized in five parts in order to provide the reader with a framework to answer the primary research question and thus determine the DoS ICAF compatibility with and utility within Army design methodology as a means for improved learning and understanding of complex conflict environments. The study first provides the reader with some common terms and their definitions in order to establish a common lexicon.

Next, using U.S. Army doctrine, this study will provide a description of Army design and the fundamental principles that guide its application. Army design is a meta-perspective approach and does not adopt any specific framework for practitioners to apply in developing their organization for learning and understanding of complex conflict environments. However, it is organized with three elements that interact continuously and collectively establish the learning methodology practitioners use to understand complex conflict environments and develop operational approaches to resolve them. This section focuses heavily on one of the three Army design elements, the environmental frame, which guides practitioners on how to understand the operational environment. By providing the information in this manner, the reader will have a greater appreciation of the compatibility aspects of the ICAF later in the study.

The third section provides the history of the ICAF, its underlying theoretical foundations, and explores how the framework is applied in support of USG foreign policy development and assistance planning for conflict prevention, mitigation and stabilization. Using DoS Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) literature, the study will outline briefly the key concepts essential to the ICAF analysis and provide the reader with a working knowledge

of how the process develops understanding of complex conflict environments by seeking to identify the underlying societal and situational dynamics. Similar to Army design, the ICAF uses a multidisciplinary approach to understanding complex conflict environments but in contrast, it adopts a framework that lays out a process in which to do so. This section also provides the reader with the baseline of knowledge necessary to consider the ICAF's compatibility with Army design.

Section four provides the reader with an examination highlighting the similarities and differences between the two methodological approaches and their associated forms of inquiry. Recall that Army design is a meta-perspective approach and does not adopt any specific framework; therefore, any attempt to compare the efficacy of the two approaches is not directly possible. The section will then transition into a summary to provide recommendations that address the primary research question. This demonstrates the utility of integrating the ICAF with Army design for the purposes of establishing a conventional interagency approach to learning and understanding a complex operational environment for both military leaders and U.S. government agency partners.

## Terminology, Concepts and Theory

Throughout the monograph there are a number of terms, concepts and theories the author uses to convey meaning or understanding when discussing different aspects of Army design and the DoS ICAF. Because the theoretical underpinnings of both methodologies are an interdisciplinary amalgamation from a vast array of different fields of study there is no general consensus among academics or practitioners on the meanings of certain terms or, in some cases, agreement on the meaning of certain theories that share a common name. In order to establish a baseline of understanding, some of the more common terms and key concepts are defined here for the reader. All terms, technical language, concepts and theories used throughout the monograph

are derived from U.S. Army doctrine, Department of State literature, or cited specifically from a peer reviewed source.

## Conflict

Before we begin any exploration of new methods used to gain a better understanding of complex conflict environments in an "era of persistent conflict," it will be useful to have a common definition or understanding of what a complex conflict environment is. First, it is sensible to define what "conflict" means, or how the term is defined for the purposes of this study. In different fields of academic study and in common use, the term "conflict" has many different meanings and is often categorized in broad levels or types. It is notoriously difficult to define and contributes greatly to the tension associated with the discourse surrounding it as a field of study. Considering that this study examines methodologies from two U.S. government departments that both seek to better understand conflict, a suitable definition might be found in their supporting literature. Below is the U.S. Army doctrinal definition of conflict:

> Conflict – (DoD) An armed struggle or clash between organized groups within a nation or between nations in order to achieve limited political or military objectives. Although regular forces are often involved, irregular forces frequently predominate. Conflict is often protracted, confined to a restricted geographic area, and constrained in weaponry and level of violence. Within this state, military power in response to threats may be exercised in an indirect manner while supportive of other instruments of national power. Limited objectives may be achieved by the short, focused, and direct application of force.[17]

As stated previously, it is difficult to define what conflict means, but the Army's definition of conflict appears to be more of a description of types of conflict rather than explanation of what it is. The definition provided is also somewhat misleading and confusing in certain instances. For example, the definition states that conflict is an armed struggle between organized groups within a nation or between nations, yet this does not seem to cover the armed

[17] U.S. Army, *Field Manual 1-02, Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2004), 1-43.

conflict threat the United States is currently engaged in against radical Islamists networks, such as Al-Qaida, who have no nation and operate in many different geographic areas around the world. Furthermore, part of the definition which suggests military power might be used indirectly to support other instruments of national power does not appear to be an explanation of conflict. It seems to be describing a method used for conflict mitigation. This is not to suggest that the U.S. Army does not understand conflict; to the contrary, it has volumes dedicated to the subject. It is just to highlight that the Army's doctrinal definition for conflict does not appear to be adequate.

Considering the other U.S. government departments involved with this study, the author sought a definition for conflict in literature provided by both the Department of State (DoS) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Neither provided a succinct definition of what conflict meant specifically, but both acknowledged that the term lends itself to a wide range of definitions and is thus difficult to define. Like the Army definition for conflict, their descriptions of conflict categorize it as "violent conflict" and means the kind of conflict that "kills thousands, leads to waves of refugees, and creates enduring climates of hate and fear that set country development back by generations."[18]

While these definitions may seem useful, they do not illuminate what conflict means or what the nature of conflict is itself. We must look beyond official publications to the research of Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall to find definitions of conflict that are useful to this study. In *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, the authors define conflict as the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups. This definition does explain conflict but in contrast to the form of conflict the Army and DoS are interested in, it suggests a wide class of struggles that also includes those that are resolved by peaceful means. Fortunately, they also provide some narrower definitions of conflict that are relevant to this study and support the Army

[18] United States Agency for International Development, *Conducting a Conflict Assessment: A Framework for Strategy and Program Development* (Washington, DC: Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, USAID, 2005), 11-12.

and U.S. agency descriptions of conflict above. The term conflict in this study will mean violent conflict. Violent conflict is defined as the pursuit of incompatible goals by different social groups where one or both parties resorts to the use of physical violence that will vary in scale.[19] But this definition is also very broad and can encompass a continuum of situations ranging from the attack on several civilians by police forces to an all-out war between two states that result in a massive number of casualties. In this respect, the authors consent that there is no single definition that can capture the almost infinite number of forms conflict can take. For this study, both methodologies are concerned with understanding violent conflicts that range from social conflict situations that threaten to become militarized beyond the capacity of domestic security forces to control, through to full-scale interstate war. So rather than trying to capture a definition that encompasses a detailed typology of violent conflict, which at present does not exist, the definition of violent conflict provided by the authors, and within the spectrum of conflict listed above, explains what conflict means for the purposes of this monograph. Violent conflict is the pursuit of incompatible goals by different social groups where one or both parties resorts to the use of physical violence that threatens to become militarized beyond the capacity of domestic security forces to control through to full-scale war between states.

Armed with this description, one is then left to question why any rational person would choose to resort to the use of physical violence in pursuit of their goals. The explanation for this phenomenon is well beyond the scope of this study. Identifying the sources of violent conflict has been a study for ages and continues today. Some argue that there are universal or biological explanations while others argue that causes are driven by context. For example, dating back to 431 B.C.E., in his account of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides makes the claim that those choosing to resort to violence are motivated by one or a combination of three forces: fear, honor

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[19] Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution, 2d Edition* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 28.

and interest.[20] In other words, Thucydides assumes that regardless of culture or context, the choices for war or physical violence are associated with unchanging human attributes and to threaten one or a combination of these forces manifests sufficient grievances for that choice. Arguments against this type of position would offer that these forces are certainly reasons for conflict but are not necessarily causes.[21] The forces of fear, honor and interest in a given context are only partial explanations that shape human decisions. The discourse associated with this field of study is fascinating, but again, it is well beyond the scope of this monograph. The point here is that any methodology used to understand the sources of conflict should certainly consider a framework that appreciates and is supported by a metaperspective approach.

## Complexity

Next we seek a common understanding of the term complexity. Like the preceding discussion on conflict, here too, there is neither a crisp nor common definition among natural or social scientists, let alone a unified theory.[22] The term is used extensively in military and civilian literature, but not surprisingly there is no succinct doctrinal definition for it.

In addition to the lack of a doctrinal explanation of complexity, neither the USAID nor DoS resource material used for this study provided any thorough descriptions of it either. However, there is a short assertion that violent conflict is complex because it emerges when multiple causes, taking place on multiple levels, come together and reinforce each other.[23] While very brief, violent conflict described in this context is useful because it appears that these

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[20] Robert B. Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 43.

[21] Daniel Tompkins, "Fear, Honor and Profit?: Ambiguity and Ideation in Thucydides; Athenian Speech" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott, Loews Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia, PA, August 31, 2006,) http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/5/0/6/8/pages150688/p150688-8.php (accessed November 10, 2010).

[22] Axelrod and Cohen, 15.

[23] USAID *Conflict Assessment Framework*, 11, 37.

government agencies show an appreciation of recent theories associated with the field of complex systems science. An explanation of complex systems theory would be appropriate here, however, the practical significance and the theoretical foundation for this distinction are introduced only to provide the reader with information leading to a better appreciation of complex systems theory discussed later in this section.

The Army uses the term complexity in a variety of contexts, but in both capstone and referential doctrinal publications, complexity, perhaps unintentionally, is essentially characterized as either "complicated" or as "uncertainty." Similar to DoS and USAID usage of the term, the Army's descriptions of complexity show some appreciation of recent theoretical developments in the field of systems science and complexity.

*Field Manual 3-0, Operations* devotes a whole section to the topic without really accurately describing what it means.[24] Curiously this section states that future operational environments will be complex and that in this environment "Soldiers can expect to deal with more *complicated* situations than ever before" [emphasis added]. *Field Manual 5-0, The Operations Process* also devotes a whole section to describe complexity.[25] This manual provides more precise descriptions of what complexity means. The context in which complexity is described relates to why operational environments are complex. Complexity is described as "things or situations with many parts and subparts (structural complexity), as well as the behaviors and resulting relationships among those parts and subparts (interactive complexity.)" Oddly enough, the section begins by stating that operational environments are "both complex and continuously changing." What is curious and odd about both of the aforementioned sections, with

[24]U.S. Army, *Field Manual 3-0, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2008), 28. FM 3-0 is one of the two Army capstone doctrinal publications. FM 1-0, *The Army*, is the second. FM 1-0 uses the term "complexity" extensively throughout the publication but does not devote any sections to describe what complexity means.

[25] U.S. Army, *Field Manual 5-0, The Operations Process* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2010), 14. FM 5-0 is not a capstone doctrinal publication but is one of the four major Army referential doctrinal publications.

the exception being their description of "interactive complexity," is that what the Army describes as structural complexity is what the systems science field recognizes as being complicated or a complicated system. Furthermore, just because operational environments are described as "continuously changing," this does not necessarily make them complex.

The fact that an operational environment is comprised of "things or situations with many parts and subparts" does not necessarily make it interactively complex. In this respect, it is complicated. Complicated systems are composed of many interacting variables or parts which make precise prediction *difficult* but not impossible.[26] The variables or parts in a complicated system are in themselves inert or fixed (they don't change) which makes them amenable to reductive mechanistic analysis through probability or statistical methods. While it might be difficult to understand or predict, "structural complexity" in itself is not complex, it is complicated.

The Army description of interactive complexity leads us closer to understanding what complexity might mean but falls short in doing so. The given description of interactive complexity above infers there is perhaps additional complexity in an operational environment if one considers the behaviors and relationships involved with "structural complexity." This is not the case. The description of interactive complexity is also considered a characteristic of complicated systems. This is reinforced later in the section where it explains that interactive complexity is *difficult* to discern due to how the many entities in an operational environment will behave and interact and what the resulting relationships will be – they will *always* result in differing circumstances, thus no two operational environments are the same. The description of interactive complexity is a given, that is, it needs no separate category or term considering the innate characteristics of a complicated system (i.e., it should be naturally assumed that many parts

[26] Complicity: International Journal of Complexity and Education. "Complexity and Education," http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/index.htm (accessed September 12, 2010).

will have many interactions; and again, difficult infers that some measure of probability or statistical analysis of the group behaviors may lead to prediction or understanding). When this section describes the operational environments in this context, complexity meaning "both structurally and interactively complex," the Army is really describing a complicated system.

Finally, the section summary on complexity provides an additional characteristic of operational environments that leads the reader to a closer understanding of what complexity means but is incomplete. It states that an operational environment is not static but continually evolves and that this evolution is the result of human interaction within an operational environment. Further it explains that humans have the ability to "learn and adapt," and the actions they take may "change" the operational environment in some unanticipated way. Even further, these changes may not be immediately apparent or may even be delayed. Unfortunately, the description ends here and fails to further explain the phenomenon that is occurring. The reader is left to think that an operational environment continually evolves simply because there are people who interact and take action within it. Obviously this is not the case, but the linear description provided here would lead one to think it might be. It does not explain why human learning occurs or why adaptive behavior may ensue. Nor does it link how adaptive behavior may change the way in which humans interact with or within the operational environment. These explanations are valuable because the characteristics being described in this section are known in complexity theory as feedback loops, self-organization and emergent behaviors. These ideas are focal points in understanding complexity, but their doctrinal explanations are incomplete and lack recognition. Before moving into a discussion of these ideas and why they are valuable, it is important to consider other contexts in which the Army uses the term complex. The relevancy of this information supports why the author feels that the Army descriptions of complexity and its use in doctrine may be lacking in certain contexts and ambiguous in others.

In addition to describing operational environments as complex, the Army also uses the term to describe the challenges associated with conducting "full-spectrum operations" and the

challenges associated with military planning. In both aforementioned doctrinal field manuals, the Army explains that its capstone operating concept embodies partnering with a milieu of other service components, multi-national forces, governmental and nongovernmental agencies in order to apply lethal and nonlethal means to conduct full-spectrum operations. "This interaction is simple in concept but *complex* in application [emphasis added]." Conversely, both manuals also state that the partnerships and interactions have become "more complicated" or form a "complicated mixture." In this context, *FM 3-0 and FM 5-0* both infer two different meanings of the term complex even though it is not expressly stated as such. If the Army is implying that working with a wide array of partners presents levels of uncertainty in the outcome of these partnerships (which is true for any social system[27]), then why not just consistently describe full-spectrum operations as being complex? The term complex should not be intermixed in the lexicon. It is either complex or complicated.

With respect to military planning, FM 5-0 explains that "the degree of interactive complexity associated with the situation is the primary factor that determines the problem's structure."[28] Problems being the issue or set of issues that impede the Army force from achieving a desired set of conditions at the conclusion of an operation. There are three types of problems: well structured, medium structured and ill structured. A full description of these problem types is not necessary, but it is suffice to say that the discriminating variable between the types of problems is dependent upon the level of "interactive complexity" involved with each one: well-structured problems having no interactive complexity and ill-structured problems being the most interactively complex. The issues associated with the Army's description of "interactive

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[27] L. Douglas Kiel and Euel Elliott, *Chaos Theory in the Social Sciences: Foundations and Applications* (Ann Arbor MI: University Press, 1997), 2-3. Human interactions are natural systems. Such systems exhibit qualities of instability, disequilibrium and uncertainty, all of which are processes of any social systems behavior.

[28] *FM 5-0*, 29.

complexity" have already been addressed but one may surmise from this study's analysis of the Army descriptions and use of the term as perhaps being lacking or ambiguous, a problem solving classification structure based upon it might be as well.

Now we return to the discussion on why the *FM 5-0* description of complexity brings the reader closer to understanding complexity and why those ideas are valuable to understanding complexity. Recall that these additional characteristics of operational environments are related to the field of systems science and complexity theory. By stating that operational environments continuously evolve as a result of human learning and adaptive behavior, the doctrine is similar to what many systems scientists describe today as self-organization and emergent behaviors, which are focal points of complexity theory and principal characteristics of complex systems. Furthermore, by positing that operational environments, as a whole, are affected by adaptive human behavior, the doctrine is describing systemic relationships or the interdependency of the many "parts and subparts" of an operational environment.

In contrast to the description of a complicated system discussed previously, this description of the "parts and subparts" of "things and situations" are not inert but dynamic with some of the "parts and subparts" having autonomous capabilities that impact the others. This impact may result in the same behavior or may manifest in the form of new behaviors or relationships not previously seen or expected.

These additional descriptions are useful and come very close to describing complexity, but what is unfortunate is that they also conclude by stating that "the complex *and* ever-changing nature of an operational environment makes determining the relationship between cause and effect *difficult* and contributes to the *uncertainty* of military operations."[29] There should be no delineation between complex and an ever-changing nature. An "ever-changing nature" is a primary characteristic of what complexity means. Determining the relationship between cause

[29] *FM 5-0*, 14.

and effect is not *difficult* – because of the self-organizing characteristics of a complex system and the interdependency between the "parts and subparts", you can *never* entirely predict all the behaviors and relationships. Again, *difficult* implies that it may be hard to do but may also be possible.

In fairness to the Army doctrine, there are no concise definitions of complexity that all complex systems scientists agree upon. While Army doctrine does not specifically acknowledge that it adopts systems thinking or embraces elements of complexity theory, its definitions and usage of complexity certainly shows appreciation of both. Perhaps some of the doctrinal deficiencies and/or ambiguity associated with complexity can be attributed to the friction from the field of systems research itself.

Since the introduction of General System Theory in the mid-20th century by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the systems science field has rapidly evolved and can be characterized today as being split between what are considered "hard" and "soft" systems approaches used to understand and control complexity.[30] For practical purposes, the variation between the approaches in their most basic forms relates to the differences in social theory that underpins each approach and the type of analysis (and synthesis) used to study and understand a system.[31] Hard approaches, such as systems engineering and operations research, generally adopt mechanistic, mathematical or systematic analytical methods to study and understand a system. These types of methods rely on quantitative data in order to recognize trends that provide understanding of a whole system. In contrast, soft systems approaches generally reject the notion that a system - social systems in particular - can be broken down and analyzed. Taking a different view of social reality, soft

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[30] Alex J. Ryan, "What is a Systems Approach? "Cornell University Library, http://arxiv.org/abs/0809.1698 (accessed September 10, 2008): 1, 6.

[31] Peter Checkland and John Poulter, *Learning for Action: A Short Definitive Account of Soft Systems Methodology and its use for Practitioners, Teachers and Students* (Chi Chester, Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 172.

systems approaches adopt looser structured methods and investigate human social systems from multiple perspectives. Hard systems rely on theory of social reality that facilitates the use of quantitative data for the purposes of analysis; whereas soft systems view social reality as something that is continuously changing and requires multiple perspectives in order to construct it. Because a soft systems approach adopts the view that the system is continuously evolving or changing, its theory of social reality does not lend itself to mechanistic analytical methods.[32] Peter Checkland and John Poulter suggest that each approach is neither right nor wrong, rather that hard systems approaches are generally better suited under certain circumstances or more precisely, hard systems have only limited applicability to human social situations.[33]

Returning to the complexity issues found in Army doctrine, the use of mechanistic (hard systems) approaches to deal with complexity have underpinned Army systematic planning and problem solving processes since the development of systems theory in the late 1950s. Since complexity science and contemporary soft systems approaches only became firmly established in the 1980s, this might explain why the doctrinal descriptions and usage of complexity might be lacking and/or ambiguous in certain contexts. For example, the Army's doctrinal definition of a system is rooted strongly within hard systems science. In *FM 3-0*, it states that a system is "a functionally, physically, and/or behaviorally related group of interacting or interdependent elements; that group of elements forming a unified whole."[34] This definition leads one to believe that if you could identify each of the related groups and how they are connected, one could understand the system or "unified whole." And the definition fits nicely with the systematic process the Army's uses for military decision making. But ambiguously, *FM 5-0* seems to adopt both hard and soft systems view of complexity. When it describes operational environments as

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[32] Ibid., 173.

[33] Ibid., 172.

[34] *FM 3-0*, 196.

continuously evolving because of human dynamics – that no two operational environments will be the same – it appears to appreciate a soft systems approach. However, it also describes operational environments as being both structurally and interactively complex, which in essence, really describes a complicated system and seems to embrace hard systems theory. Interestingly, while FM 3-0 and FM 5-0 both show a strong appreciation of systems theory, neither discusses nor describes any components of it. This too might help explain why it is difficult to get a better appreciation of what complexity means from Army doctrine.

Because it does not, this study turns towards contemporary research in the field of complex systems science in order to provide the reader with a better appreciation of complexity and understand how the two methodologies in this study attempt to understand complex environments associated with violent conflict or more succinctly, that violent conflict is itself a complex system. The author chooses to explore contemporary complex systems theory primarily because it embodies multiple disciplines and offers a framework that provides deeper insight than traditional mechanistic or reductionist approaches in the study of human social systems. Thus far, Army descriptions of complexity, while they appear to be maturing, still lean towards linear, mechanistic terms that are better suited for understanding objective based complicated systems.

## Complex Adaptive Systems

Complexity theory adopts the basic logic of the other related systems fields (both hard and soft) and assumes a multidisciplinary position, whereby it utilizes a systemic approach in pursuit of understanding complexity, compared to the agendas of other mechanistic (hard) and holistic (soft) systems theories.[35] Complexity theory seeks to explain complexity by understanding both its parts (analysis) and their relationships (synthesis).[36]

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[35] Ryan, *What is a Systems Approach*, 8.

[36] Ibid., 8.

Complexity theorists generally define complex systems as systems that exhibit organic, non-linear, dynamic, self-organizing, adaptive, and emergent qualities.[37] These qualities reveal that complexity essentially describes entities as being complex wholes with a great number of autonomous agents, each having multiple interactions, open to feedback from its environment, capable of changing or adapting behaviors in response to feedback, and where behaviors of one component changes other component behaviors.

Social systems are most often associated as being complex systems. Social systems include societies, religions, cultures, and even group identities. These systems have multiple layers of hierarchy and within them a large number of human interactions that represents a network. Within the network, autonomous agents cooperate and compete with one another in order to achieve their purposes. These interactions or exchanges form continuous reinforcing and counteracting feedback loops and create interdependencies among agents on multiple levels. The behavior of agents and the system is dependent upon the open flow of feedback meeting the needs of the agent and/or the system. If needs are not met, agent purposes and interactions will evolve. This is the underlying cause of variety or counter-intuitive behavior within the system. When this variety results in novel coherent patterns of behavior of the system as a whole in relation to other systems, this is emergent behavior. Thus social systems are open feedback systems, which have a variety of interdependent components, and are capable of changing their structure and behavior.

Conflict most often represents a clash between societies, religions, cultures and/or identities.[38] The goals of different collectives of agents are incompatible. When interactions between agents with incompatible goals are driven by positive feedback, behavior is quickly driven to extremes. One or more collective of agents may resort to the use of physical violence

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[37] Ibid., 27-28.

[38] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 207.

that threatens to become militarized until needs of the collective are satisfied. In this context, violent conflict is considered the emergent behavior of a social system. This reinforces the previous introduction of complexity from DoS and USAID literature describing violent conflict as being complex because "…it emerges when multiple causes, taking place on multiple levels, come together and reinforce each other."

Now that the reader understands the basic framework of this study and has been provided some basic descriptions of terms, concepts and theories to be used in later discussions, one can now begin to answer the monograph's primary research question next with a study of Army design.

# Army Design

## Background

The Army officially adopted design thinking as a methodology in March 2010 with its introduction in the doctrinal publication *Field Manual 5-0, The Operations Process.* In this manual, the Army defines design as its methodology for applying critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe complex problems and developing approaches to solve them. It is an alternative or new approach to Army operational thinking and conceptual planning. [39] The debate surrounding the Army's need for such a methodology is ambiguous and long, but the discourse associated with the concepts of design thinking date back to 2005. In the wake of the security challenges still associated with the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of war, there were growing arguments in the professional military community that current doctrinal planning processes were limited in their usefulness to addressing the milieu of emerging complex security challenges facing military leaders.

[39] U.S. Army, *Field Manual 5-0, The Operations Process*, 45.

Critiques centered on the industrial or systematic approaches to warfare taken by the U.S. in both Afghanistan and Iraq from 2001 through 2005 characterized traditional planning as insufficient to meet the operational demands placed upon the military. It can be argued that military completed its strategic objectives in both campaigns but others argue otherwise due to the lack of a stable Iraq or Afghanistan in the wake of successful combat operations. Regardless, military leaders at all levels of these wars attested to having been given tasks that encompassed political, social and economic situations that lacked any clearly definable military objectives.

These types of situations are not anything new to the military, however, the globalized environment these situations present themselves in today have created levels and types of complexity that are novel. Lacking a planning process tolerant to the changing nature of these situations, military leaders have had to adapt existing processes to develop new ways to learn and understand the complexity of the environments they are operating in while also considering new approaches to accomplish their missions. Having the knowledge gained from almost a decade of 21st century combat combined with years of academic study and research, Army design is the latest "tool" to assist military leaders with what they have been doing in an ad hoc fashion since the Global War on Terror began[40] – it is an evolving conceptual methodology that arms military practitioners with the cognitive tools to both understand complex situations and developing approaches to change them.

## Theoretical Elements of U.S. Army Design

Army design is a meta-perspective methodology and does not adopt any specific framework for its application. Its theoretical underpinnings lie heavily with complexity theory which the reader can relate to from earlier discussions on systems theory, complexity, and

[40] Stefan J. Banach. "Educating By Design: Preparing Leaders for a Complex World," *Military Review* (March-April 2009): 97.

complex adaptive systems (specifically, discussions on human social systems and their qualities of interdependence, adaptation, self-organization and emergence). It is also inspired by postmodernist views of deconstructivism and discourse where heuristic techniques, like the use of meta-questioning, aids practitioners with constructing the reality of the environment, or system, they are trying to understand.

These types of approaches foster open discourse among participants in order to produce alternative perspectives that challenge pre-conceived or established mental models of the situation. In this capacity, identifying differences between mental models serves as a medium for learning in order to create new models more compatible to the observed or emerging context of the situation. This does not advocate ignoring established mental models, but by comparing and identifying gaps and/or mismatches between them, it encourages practitioners to move beyond presupposed or analytical descriptions towards learning the logic behind the relational qualities of an environment which then yields new and comprehensive understanding more relevant to the observed context.[41] The dialectical continuum involved in constructing the new model, or system frame, simultaneously provides insights on how to potentially transform the system as well. Through this learning process, practitioners come to realize the logic behind the situation's emerging context, which then lends itself to identifying the limits of intervention required in the system or realizing new opportunities that may transform the undesirable situation into a favorable one.

## Design Methodology

The doctrinal description of design may seem to follow a logical and orderly conceptual model, but this only done so that military practitioners or those readers unfamiliar with design

[41] Shimon Naveh, Jim Schneider and Timothy Challans, *The Structure of Operational Revolutions: A Prolegomena* (Leavenworth, Kansas: Booz Allen Hamilton, 2009), 79-80.

thinking may begin to understand it. This is to say that the methodology is very flexible in practice. It is not a systematic process which is normally associated with other military decision making processes the Army uses for problem solving. Design is a non-linear, interactive and a continuous systems thinking and learning activity.[42]

Design begins when a military leader is faced with a problem situation where the desired objective is not clear nor is the nature of the problem itself present. Because of this dilemma, what action or actions the military leader should pursue are unknown or there are no clear choices to be made. In Army doctrine, these types of problem situations are defined as ill-structured problems.[43] These problem situations have been and are expected to be a consistent phenomenon facing military leaders as discussed in previously in the study. The methodology relies on three distinct elements that collectively emerge into a concept that helps the military leader define the ill-structured problem and broad approaches that are aimed to solve them. The design concept is the product used by the military leader to communicate this understanding to his superiors, peers and subordinates and leads to detailed military planning and the coordinated execution of military operations.

Because design is a continuous systems thinking and learning activity, the design concept surfaces initial assumptions about the nature of the problem which provides a baseline for learning as operations are conducted. As the environment changes over time, the design concept provides the freedom to reflect on knowledge gained during the course of the operations process which might fill in information gaps or even reveal new understanding of the problem. This evidence allows the military leader to challenge his starting hypothesis to determine whether the operational approach remains feasible and acceptable in the context of higher guidance and

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[42] Stefan J. Banach and Alex Ryan, "The Art of Design: A Design Methodology," *Military Review* (March-April 2009), 108.

[43] U.S Army, *FM 5-0*. 30.

orders. If the new understanding reveals that the approach is failing to meet these criteria, the design approach provides the leader with the cognitive ability to reframe the efforts of the organization and revise earlier design conclusions. Reframing allows the military leader to make adjustments throughout the operations process, ensuring that operational activities remain linked to achieving the desired conditions of the operational environment.

The three elements of Army design are: the environmental frame, the problem frame and the solution frame. In Army Field Manual 5-0 it states that these three elements collectively form an organizational learning methodology that corresponds to three basic questions that must be answered in order to produce the design concept discussed above: What is the context in which design will be applied? What problem is the design intended to solve? What broad, general approach will solve the problem? Each of these frames captures a shared understanding of the environment in which the military leader will operate, the problem he or she is trying to solve, and broad, flexible approaches they might employ to solve the problem.

The design concept and each of the design elements used to develop it are all communicated in both graphic and narrative forms. The methodology adopts both communication methods due to their combined contributions towards creating and communicating holistic understanding. Graphics, drawings, or pictures are very useful tools for mapping or organizing the variables in a system and depicting their relationships.

According to Peter Checkland, the use of what he describes as "rich pictures" are excellent tools for capturing the dynamics of a situation and for surfacing different worldviews.[44] In this case, designers are able to quickly develop pictures or sketches modeling the situation they are observing and through structured discourse, designers are able to compare these representations against their own worldviews and develop shared understanding of the actual context being observed. Narratives may give further meaning to the graphics used by designers or

[44] Checkland and Poulter, *Learning for Action,* 25-27.

they may give meaning to the data or analysis used to explore the components or variables of situation and the applied logic used to structure its shape. Another way to say this is that the narrative does more than merely present the chronological facts of the situation, but rather tells the story. The central idea is that both methods aid in providing a meta-perspective of the situation being observed along with systemic understanding of its context.

## Environmental Frame

Generally military leaders or Army designers construct the environmental frame when the design process begins. This requires conceptualizing the environment as a system, which means thinking more about the relationships between actors associated with the situation than the particular details of the individual actors themselves. This frame captures the history, culture, current state and future goals of relevant actors in the operational environment. Through the design learning process, the boundaries of the inquiry will expand and contract based on current levels of understanding of the situation and the ability comprehend and explain the current or emerging situation. The frame continuously evolves in scope relevant to the higher military organization's purpose and the Army design team's ability to explain or understand why the situation exists and what it may become.

In order to frame the operational environment, FM 5-0 offers that military leaders should review existing directives, guidance, relevant operational and intelligence documents and/or data, and doctrinal resources in order to help them draw and narrate their understanding of the operational environment.[45] Through the use of heuristic techniques mentioned earlier or other thinking tools, the environmental frame continuously evolves and reflects the military leaders' understanding of the patterns of the current operational environment and its future state. The future state is a reflection of the military leaders' understanding of how relevant actors and their

[45] *FM 5-0*, 49.

relationships contribute to the observed operational environment and the variance between this understanding and the desired conditions sought by his superiors.

While the doctrine does not provide any descriptive methods to develop the frame, there is substantial academic and Army literature to assist military leaders with this process.[46] Military leaders have to be extremely cautious in developing this frame. As discussed earlier, design's heuristic methods aim to prevent applying pre-existing models as the only means to understand the operational environment. It also important to note here that this frame, as well as the other two, may be appear to be conceptually separated but they are not separated in practice. Cycling repeatedly between the three frames iteratively and concurrently facilitates understanding to emerge and relates the solutions to the problem within the context of the environment.[47]

## Problem Frame

The problem frame is a refinement of the environmental frame and defines, in both narrative and graphics, the areas for action that will transform the existing or emerging conditions towards the desired conditions the military leaders seeks to establish. Even though design is a highly iterative, it is very difficult to define the problem without having a developed a mature environmental frame.[48] It requires identifying the areas of tension and competition that the military leader will have to address in order to move the operational environment towards the desired conditions. The discourse in this frame revolves around identifying the positive, neutral and negative implications of tensions between the existing and the desired conditions of the

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[46] *FM 5-0* bibliography provides a number of academic resources to assist military leaders with critical and creative thinking tools; the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies *Art of Design Student Text, Version 2.0* is also a very useful resource and provides a robust suite of tools and product examples for the military designer and interagency partners.

[47] Banach and Ryan, "The Art of Design: A Design Methodology," 109.

[48] Ibid., 110.

operational environment. Isolating these tensions or root causes of conflict and deciding how to address them essentially describes how designers define their ill-structured problem.

### Solution Frame

While the problem frame discourse identifies the areas of the environment that need to change, the solution frame, or design concept, conceptualizes the general actions that will produce the conditions that lead toward the desired operational environment.[49] The tensions identified in the environmental and problem frames provide the design team with ideas for what action or combination of actions might move the system towards or away the desired environment. This includes identifying the capabilities and intentions of actors who oppose the desired conditions sought by the military leader.[50] In order to exploit the tensions of the system that will move it towards the desired state while mitigating the emergence of unintended consequences resultant from negative actions requires a synthesis from all three spaces.[51] The design concept organizes the combinations of potential military actions in time, space, and purpose that that will deny opposing systems and support systems of transformation that best modify the observed operational environment into the desired operational environment.[52]

## The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework

### Background

The Department of State (DoS) Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework is an "elicitive and interactive" tool that enables a team comprised of a variety of U.S. government

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[49] *FM 5-0*, 55.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Banach and Ryan, "The Art of Design: A Design Methodology," 112.

agency representatives (interagency) to collaboratively assess conflict dynamics in a specific country and support interagency planning for conflict prevention, mitigation and stabilization.[53]

The framework was developed in October 2007 by a U.S. government interagency work group formed under the Reconstruction and Stabilization Policy Coordinating Committee (RSPCC). The committee was co-chaired by the DoS Office of the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction (S/CRS) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Conflict Management (CMM.) The interagency working group was formed with representatives from various U.S. government departments and agencies including the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Forces Command and the U.S. Army's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. The framework was successfully piloted in May 2008 in an application workshop on Tajikistan with 18 representatives from various offices within USAID, DoS, and the Departments of Defense, Agriculture and Treasury. In July 2008, the RSPCSS members officially endorsed the ICAF and adopted the framework as the first step in the interagency strategic level planning process for conflict prevention, mitigation and stabilization.[54]

The ICAF is predicated on the assumption that the first step toward a more effective and coordinated response to help states prevent, mitigate and recover from conflict is the development of shared understanding among U.S. government agencies about the sources of violent conflict or civil strife.[55] Achieving this shared understanding of the dynamics that shape a particular crisis

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[53] Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), "Interagency Conflict Assessment (ICAF) Methodologies," (training handout, Arlington, VA: S/CRS, March 18, 2008).

[54] Cynthia Irmer, Senior Conflict Prevention Officer, S/CRS, e-mail message to author, June 28, 2010.

[55] United States Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, *The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* (Washington, D.C.: S/CRS, 2008), 5.

requires both a joint interagency process for conducting the assessment and a common conceptual framework to guide the collection and analysis of information.[56]

The necessity of the ICAF emerged in 2005 under the Bush administration. Following the initial military successes in Afghanistan and Iraq, there was growing concern in the administration that there was imbalance in national statecraft for addressing the rising security challenges and destabilizing trends in both theaters. Additionally, this imbalance was growing with the other strategic preventative initiatives being taken elsewhere in support of the 2002 NSS that were aimed at mitigating potential threats to U.S. security interests.[57] The consensus in the administration was that there was not an overarching strategy or framework to guide the stabilization and conflict risk reduction activities of the various agencies.[58]

To address these issues, the President and the Congress issued a mandate to the Secretary of State to lead the coordination of interagency reconstruction efforts. Once the Secretary of State received authorization in the summer of 2004, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) came into existence. The mission of the S/CRS is to "lead, coordinate and institutionalize U.S. government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy and a market economy."[59] The President reinforced the mandate with the promulgation of National Security Presidential Directive-44 on 07 December 2005 which further defined the leadership role of the Secretary of

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[56] Ibid., 5.

[57] Dane F. Smith Jr., *An Expanded Mandate for Peace Building: The State Department Role in Peace Diplomacy, Reconstruction, and Stabilization, A Report of the CSIS Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), preface.

[58] Abbas Mossalanejad, "Obama's Geopolitical Initiation: Preventive Strategy," *Geopolitics Quarterly* 5, no.3 (Winter, 2009):76.

[59] Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, "Mission Statement," Department of State, http://www.crs.state.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.display&shortcut=4QXJ (accessed 30 May 2010).

State (and S/CRS) to coordinate and lead the efforts of all U.S. departments and agencies with relevant capabilities to prepare, plan for and conduct reconstruction and stabilization activities, including synchronization with any planned or ongoing military operations.[60] This directive essentially grouped all U.S. efforts to respond to emerging threats of instability and conflict – particular those associated with weak or failing states – under the responsibility of the DoS and S/CRS.[61] It specifically requires the Secretaries of State and Defense to coordinate and synchronize all civilian and military efforts to ensure integrated civilian and military planning. On November 28, 2005 the Department of Defense issued its own Directive 3000.5 that complements this requirement and made stability operations a core mission, no longer secondary to combat operations.[62]

S/CRS identified that its first requirement was to fill the need of a standardized interagency approach for planning and managing reconstruction and stabilization operations.[63] This returns to the earlier discussion of work done by RSPCC and the predicated assumption that the first step any proposed interagency planning process requires an integrated understanding of the situation and the underlying drivers of instability or conflict.[64] The interagency planning process requires a structured, but flexible, assessment methodology that can synthesize other

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[60] *Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization, National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-44*, 7 December 2005. http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-44.html (accessed 14 May 2010); U.S. Army, *Field Manual 3-07*, *Stability Operations,* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2008), 2-5.

[61] Mossalanejad, "Preventive Strategy," 76.

[62] U.S. Department of Defense. *Directive* 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 28 November 2005), 2.

[63] S/CRS mandate is specifically tied to conflict situations. The reconstruction and stabilization planning system is not employed for natural disasters or humanitarian emergencies. Janet Beik, *Developing the United States Government's Interagency Management System for Reconstruction and Stabilization: A Work in Progress* (lecture, Washington, D.C.: Department of the State, March 2007), 2.

[64] U.S. Joint Forces Command, *United States Joint Forces Command J7 Pamphlet, Version 1.0: U.S. Government Draft Planning Framework for Reconstruction, Stabilization, and Conflict Transformation* (Norfolk, VA: USJFCOM, 2005), 18,

existing assessments provided by major stakeholders (including international, nongovernmental and think tank communities) in order to promote integrated understanding of the underlying drivers of instability or conflict, the U.S. interests at stake, key assumptions, possible contingencies, anticipated resource availability, and the dynamics of the regional and international context.[65] Through extensive coordination among the various agencies supporting the RSPCC, the ICAF emerged as that assessment methodology.

In October 2007, the ICAF and the other components of the new interagency planning process for reconstruction and stabilization, officially the Interagency Management System (IMS), was officially approved by senior policy makers and adopted by all U.S. government agencies.[66] The IMS provides a framework that assists U.S. policymakers, Chiefs of Missions (COMs), and military commanders in managing complex reconstruction and stabilization engagements by ensuring coordination among all U.S. government stakeholders at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. The framework is designed for highly complex crises which have been identified as national security priorities, involve widespread instability, the potential use of military forces, and requires engaging multiple U.S. agencies for policy and programmatic responses. When the IMS is triggered, S/CRS planning and operations division has the responsibility to provide core teams as required, in Washington, with military combatant commands, and in the affected country. [67]

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[65] Ibid.

[66] U.S. Department of Defense, "Report on Improving Interagency Support for United States 21st Century National Security Missions and Interagency Operations in Support of Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations (Report to Congress, Washington, D.C.: DoD, 2007.) 15, 19. USJFCOM, *U.S. Government Draft Planning Pamphlet*, 19; U.S. Army, *Field Manual 3-07, Stability Operations*,129.

[67] Ibid. The JFCOM J7 pamphlet and U.S. Army *FM 3-07* provide a thorough description of the IMS.

## The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework

As a process of the Interagency Management System, the ICAF is designed to be a "flexible, scalable interagency tool" for use in steady-state engagement and conflict prevention planning, U.S. government reconstruction and stabilization contingency planning and U.S. government reconstruction and stabilization crisis response planning.[68]

The type of planning situation determines which agencies and individuals participate in the ICAF and also in what capacity they should serve. In this context, the IMS follows a protocol that specifies which agency or agencies will lead the interagency team through the process and which agencies should be included as principal participants. The principles of the ICAF make it clear that the team include the broadest possible representation of U.S. government agencies with expertise and/or interest in the given situation.[69] Members of the interagency team are notified by the prospective agency and are then responsible for providing all relevant information available from his/her agency, to include past assessments and any other useful products for inclusion in the analysis.

The ICAF is designed to be an iterative process but depending on the planning situation, the amount of time available drives the level of detail the ICAF will go into and any potential for future iterations. For example, the ICAF may be done in Washington, D.C. at the start of contingency planning and as the situation develops, time is allocated to conduct an iteration of the process in-country with interagency partners that have a better appreciation of the situation and can assist with enhancing the assessment. As time permits, another iteration would be conducted at the field level and may include actual participants engaged in the conflict. In contrast, for crisis response planning the ICAF may be a Washington, D.C. based tabletop assessment that is accomplished in as little as a couple of days.

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[68] DoS, "Principles of the ICAF", 3.

[69] DoS, *ICAF*, 5.

The framework requires participants to move through a process that consists of two major components. The two major components of the ICAF are Conflict Diagnosis and Segue into Planning. Segue into Planning is the second component and is only conducted when the ICAF is undertaken to support U.S. government reconstruction and stabilization crisis response or contingency planning. In each component there consist several subordinate steps with each step having subsequent tasks to accomplish. The primary steps of Conflict Diagnosis are: 1) Context; 2) Understand Core Grievances and Sources of Social and Institutional Resilience; 3) Identify Drivers of Conflict and Mitigating Factors; and 4) Describe Opportunities for Increasing Conflict and Opportunities for Decreasing Conflict. A more detailed discussion of these steps will follow later. However, Figure 1 is provided below to give the reader a brief description of the process:

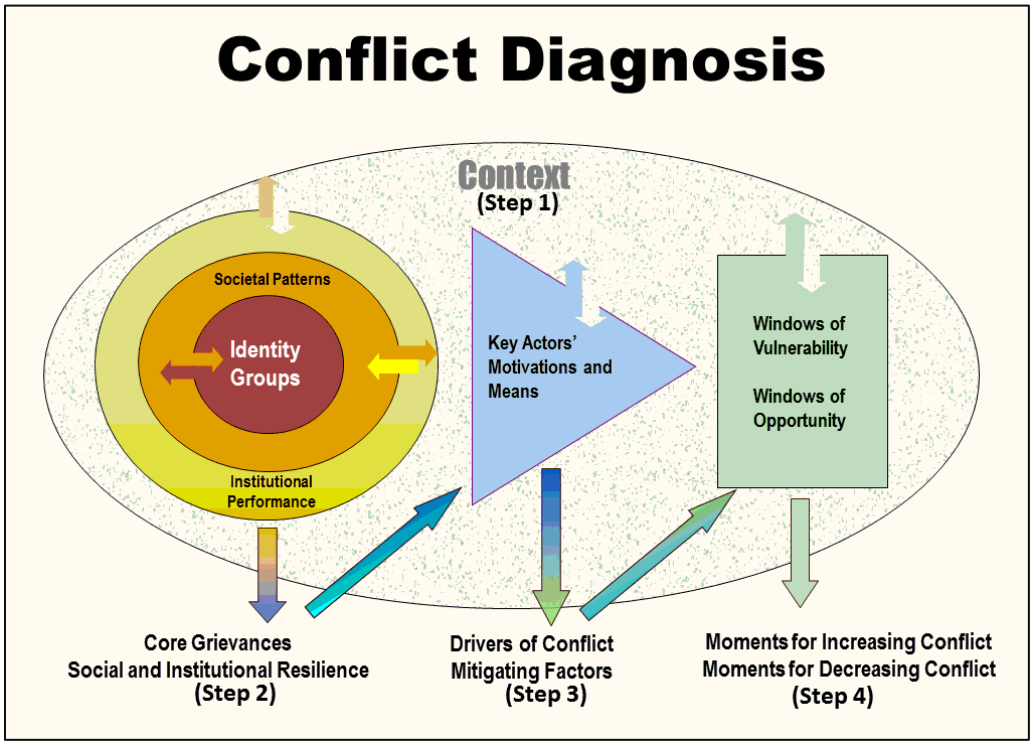


Figure 1: ICAF Conflict Diagnosis Framework[70]

[70] S/CRS, "What is a Conflict Assessment Framework" (presentation, Washington, D.C.: S/CRS, 2009), 10.

The arrows going in and out of the concentric circles, the rectangle and the triangle within the larger circle are designed to remind interagency participants that the "context" affects and is affected by each of the other components. The other arrows seen in the illustration will be explained further on in this discussion.

Completing the assessment depends upon following the series of analytical steps and their associated tasks. Completion of the first step and tasks results in a list designed for its purpose and then leads to the next step. In some instances, a list generated in a previous step may be required to assist practitioners with completing the tasks necessary to generate the new list required for the current step. The ICAF asserts that each step begins with all participants acknowledging "the context" within which the conflict exists.[71] A type or description of the assessment product produced upon completion of the Conflict Diagnosis or Segue into Planning components is not specified in the framework.

Interestingly, the author was unable to identify any explanations or descriptions in the framework document on how to organize the interagency team or how to conduct the process, even though in its stated purpose it insists that the key concepts, processes and products that are essential to conduct the analysis are provided. The author was also left to assume that the assessment is the combination of the lists produced for each step. However, the framework also states in its purpose statement that supplementary documents will be developed to "provide a fuller treatment of the analytical framework, appropriate tools and data collection methods, and the composition and functioning of an assessment team."[72] There is a shortage of literature documenting the theoretical underpinnings and supporting methods for implementing the ICAF, since this is still an emerging framework. However, the author was able to secure two S/CRS

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[71] DoS*, ICAF*, 7.

[72] DoS, *ICAF,* 2.

approved supplemental documents and various academic references that were very useful in providing more detail where the framework is lacking.[73] These references will be drawn on in this section to explain the four steps within the ICAF.

## The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework Methodology

The first component of the ICAF is conflict diagnosis. This component process is essentially *the* framework. The conflict diagnosis moves beyond traditional linear analytical methods and adopts a "complex, non-linear, systems perspective" to assist participants in understanding why the conditions for violent conflict exist.[74] One is to infer that the conflict being analyzed should be considered as a complex adaptive system and to understand why it exists requires "understanding the system, its elements, their relationship to each other and the principles governing system behavior."

To achieve this understanding, conflict diagnosis is conducted by means of *facilitated dialogue* and *elicitive methods*, where ICAF participants complete each of the tasks for a particular step by consistently referring to sources of data collected and/or introduced during the current step or in other steps of the process. The framework presents these steps and tasks in what appears to be a linear process; however, it implies a non-linear approach to complete them.[75] Identifying or describing a particular element of information in one step/task may in fact also satisfy the requirement of another in a completely different step/task. The non-linear approach

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[73] Department of State, Office of the Coordiantor for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), "Principles of the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework" (Washington, D.C.: S/CRS, 2008); Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), "Interagency Conflict Assessment (ICAF) Methodologies" (training handout, Arlington, VA: S/CRS, March 18, 2008).

[74] Cynthia Irmer, "A Systems Approach and the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework," *The Cornwallis Group,*(workshop paper, Analysis of Societal Conflict and Counter-Insurgency, Vienna, Austria: The Cornwallis Group, 2009), 186, http://www.thecornwallisgroup.org/workshop_2009.php; (accessed 22 May 2010).

[75] Ibid.

also infers that *completing* the steps is not necessarily done in sequence as it is presented in the framework.

Each of the tasks in the process is designed to assist participants in identifying and understanding the component parts of the complex adaptive system. The component parts of a complex adaptive system are described in the ICAF as: a) Context; b) Identity groups; c) Societal patterns; d) Institutional performance; e) Key actors and their motivations and means; and f) Windows of opportunity and vulnerability.[76] Figure 2 is provided below to give the reader a visual representation of the tasks associated with each step of the process:

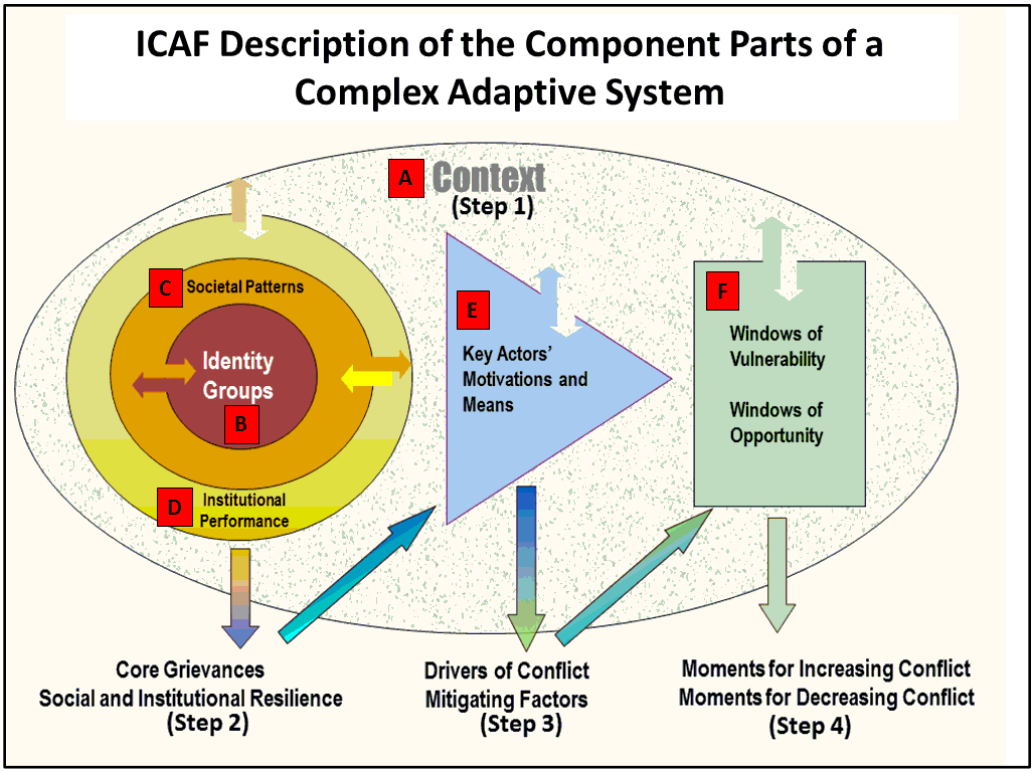


Figure 1: ICAF Conflict Diagnosis Framework77

[76] Ibid., 172.

[77] S/CRS, "What is a Conflict Assessment Framework" (presentation, Washington, D.C.: S/CRS, 2009), 10. This figure is a modified version of the original diagram titled "The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework." The original ICAF diagram does not describe the component parts as a complex adaptive system nor does it depict the steps/tasks with alpha-numerical characters.

Through data collection and facilitated dialogue, step 1 of the process identifies the agents that form the component parts "A" through "D" of the system (see Figure 1) and then develops a shared understanding of their interactions and relationships. Relying on shared understanding of these interactions, the next step in the process has participants describe how these dynamics create conditions where the needs of the agents are being prevented and who or what they perceive as the cause.

These descriptions are categorized as "core grievances" and represent the perception of various groups within the system that their needs (physical security, livelihood, interests or values) are threatened by one or more other social groups within the system. The other aspect of these descriptions represents social group perceptions that there are structures or processes in place which are capable of providing dispute resolution and/or capable of meeting their needs through non-violent means. These structures or processes are categorized as social and institutional resiliency and encompass both formal and informal social structures. Poor or good institutional performance within the system may aggravate or contribute to the resolution of conflict.

The third step has participants look towards identifying key actors who mobilize social groups around core grievances or sources of social/institutional resilience. The ICAF explains that core grievances can be understood as the potential energy of conflict. Key actors are those responsible for mobilizing social groups around core grievances and translating that energy into what the ICAF describes as the drivers of conflict. In contrast, key actors that mobilize around social/institutional resiliencies within a system are considered as mitigating factors for conflict. Using the information generated on key actors, participants draft a brief narrative statement

describing "why" and "how" key actors mobilize social groups around core grievances and separately around sources of social and institutional resilience.[78]

In the fourth and final step, the shared understanding developed during the previous steps provides participants with the ability to identify what the ICAF describes as windows of vulnerability and opportunity. Participants should attempt to specify near-term events or occasions likely to provoke negative or positive changes in the operational environment or given country context. These expected events might increase uncertainty and thereby provide an opportunity for key actors to increase or decrease conflict or instability. Once completed, these windows (events) are nested with the groups understanding of the drivers of conflict and mitigating factors identified during the previous step. The final task of this step requires participants to collectively prioritize the drivers and mitigating factors they have identified throughout the process and becomes the basis for the conflict assessment.[79]

It is important to note that the framework acknowledges that the perspective gained *completing* a step or the assessment is just a "snapshot of a particular situation that is constantly in flux."[80] Therefore, one is to infer that a step or the assessment is never really *completed.* There is also no formal template for the assessment and the type of assessment produced will vary from application to application, depending upon both the type of assessment that is requested and/or ICAF objectives provided by the IMS planning scenario.[81] Cynthia Irmer captures these ideas rather nicely when she says, "Much of the "art" of an ICAF analysis resides in the ability of the ICAF team leader's ability to facilitate the team's presentation, sharing and organization of the data collected."[82]

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[78] S/CRS, "Principles of the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework," 7.

[79] Ibid., 8.

[80] DoS, *ICAF,* 17.

[81] Irmer, "A Systems Approach and the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework,"173.

[82] Ibid.

## Theoretical Elements of the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework

The historical underpinnings of the ICAF can be traced back to the Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF) developed in 2002 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM.)[83] While ICAF is distinct from the CAF and used for different application purposes, both frameworks rely on many of the same multidisciplinary social theories, logic and practices used to recognize and understand the sources of violent conflict. The CAF was specifically designed by USAID to assist agency missions in developing assistance programs aimed at preventing or mitigating the sources of conflict or instability in a specific country context. USAID had to move from addressing the effects of violent conflict towards focusing their efforts to identifying and addressing the causes of violence. The ICAF adopts many of the principles of the CAF, but is designed to integrate multiple perspectives (interagency, international, non-governmental, and academic) and expands the conceptual framework to guide interagency assessments for developing coordinated U.S. government responses to help states prevent, mitigate and recover from violent conflict.

Conflict assessment tools were not a novel idea in 2002, but USAID believed that past and current government officials looking at conflict had a tendency to place excessive emphasis on functionalist or single-factor analyses which did not take into account the growing body of academic research in the field of conflict theory that favored more constructivist or modernist views. The USAID team did not necessarily believe that these approaches were wrong, but were partial or limited in explaining the emerging trends of conflict that were escalating following the Cold-War. Simply, there were hundreds of cases studies, comparative research and large quantitative data sets from academic, government and non-government agencies all suggesting

[83] Janet Beik, "Developing the United States Government's Interagency Management System for Reconstruction and Stabilization: A Work in Progress" (Washington, D.C.: Department of the State, March 2007); Dane F. Smith Jr., *Foreign Assistance for Peace: The US Agency for International Development, A Report of the CSIS Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), 17.

multiple circumstantial and constructive casual factors that when combined, generally increase the risk of conflict in a given country context.[84]

The CAF relies on these emerging academic and government theories that there are "certain broad clusters or categories of causes" for conflict and these causes need to be in place for violent conflict to emerge.[85] The framework appends a detailed checklist of questions to be used by an assessment to team in order discuss and examine four categories or dimensions ("broad clusters or categories") leading to violent conflict. The four categories are: (1) causes that fuel incentives for participation in violence – "greed and grievances"; (2) causes that facilitate the mobilization and expansion of violence or access to conflict resources – in particular, "dense social networks" that can be mobilized, aggrieved young men as potential recruits, and financial resources, since war is expensive; (3) causes found at the level of state and social capacity to manage and respond to violence - ranging from legitimacy through democracy and economic governance to the capacity of the security forces to repress violence; and (4) regional or international causes that may aggravate or balance violence.[86] The checklist of questions forms a sort of hybrid framework based on multiple theories, case studies, comparative research and quantitative analysis that each supports specific causes of conflict all over the world.

The CAF is an interesting methodology in that it appears to adopt a pluralist position for assessing the sources of conflict in a given country context. This is to say that the framework strongly advocates both a circumstantialist and constructivist view to understand how conflict emerges but it also considers the primordialist view and is sensitive to the cultural specificities of

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[84] Smith, *Foreign Assistance for Peace: The US Agency for International Development, A Report of the CSIS Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project*, 16.

[85] Ibid., 12.

[86] U.S. Agency for International Development. Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, *Conducting a Conflict Assessment: A Framework for Strategy and Program Development* (Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development, 2005), 12, 38-41.

the country context being assessed.[87] Specifically, once individuals are targeted because they belong to a certain group, identity turns from a relatively neutral organizing principle into a powerful tool for mobilizing mass violence.[88] The CAF approach does not question whether conflict can or will emerge along cultural "fault lines," but it does question the extent to which conflict between social groups is inevitable because of deep seated cultural practices and antipathies.[89]

Each of the categories or theories adopted by the framework has its own unique strengths and weaknesses. There are extensive discussions among academics arguing for or against each one, all citing ontological, epistemological or methodological benefits or faults. Discussion of each is well beyond the scope of this paper, but a consistent fault among the categories concerns their neglect for the dynamics of conflict.[90] While each seeks to explain the causes of conflict, whatever the original causes, issues change, the actors change and the confrontation changes. Whether the theory can comparatively or quantitatively validate the causes of certain types of conflict, the argument is that the dynamic nature of conflict creates new conditions and that the conflict being observed may be a manifestation of a different form of conflict and thus the causes identified might have been sufficient but not necessary.

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[87] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 259-261. A primordialist conceives identity as being enduring and bound to a particular society or religious community. The general strength of the primordial attachment or bond will differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. Ethnicity as a means of mobilization is not merely tied to practical necessity or incurred obligation. Circumstantialist or constructivist theorists view ethnic identity as being fluid and not enduring. Identity and association shift according to context. Ethnicity is an instrument of mobilization and leads to conflict in order to gain or maintain something.

[88] USAID, *Conducting a Conflict Assessment: A Framework for Strategy and Program Development,* 12,16.

[89] Ibid., 16.

[90] Anthony Oberschall, "Conflict Theory," in *Handbook of Politics: State and Society in Global Perspective,* ed. Kevin T. Leicht and Craig J. Jenkins (Springer, NY: Springer Science and Business Media, LLC, 2010), 182.

It is important to note here that the framework also emphasizes that the mission team must pay careful attention to the interaction effects between the variables in each category and between categories. The authors of the CAF may have been appreciative of the functionalist argument above.[91] This could explain why the framework repeatedly states that not all of the trends and variables listed in the framework will be relevant to every country team assessment, but it is critical that the team recognize that multiple variables identified in the assessment all reinforce each other and are considered as the essential building blocks of conflict – if all the forces are present, then the chances for violent conflict to take on explicit form significantly increases.[92]

The framework appreciates what is known as a soft system approach but it appears to be incomplete since it lacks multiple perspectives when gathering and analyzing the data collected from the appended questions of the framework. Checkland calls these "worldviews" and claims they are critical to gaining a more holistic understanding of the dynamics being observed.[93] The framework lacks any type of organizing reference tool in which to compare the difference between the environments being observed and the one being constructed. Furthermore, it also lacks any reference tool for the team to consider the desired state of the environment being assessed. This might be explained in that the framework is intended to be a general framework for any given country context where the team using the tool will be located in the area and have access to macro and micro level actors capable of providing the input. The framework does not

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[91] Todd Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction, Third Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 33. Kent McClelland, "Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology," Grinnell College, http://web.grinnell.edu/courses/soc/s00/soc111-01/IntroTheories/Functionalism.html (accessed October 27, 2010). A functionalist view is an intellectual position that addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its environmental elements. Conflict is thus manifested or molded by broader social forces. This is very similar to language used by system theorists. Society is viewed as system of interrelated parts and a change in any part affects all the others. The variables may vary in degree in different parts of the globe, but they exist and combined are responsible for shaping what form conflict take.

[92] Oberschall, "Conflict Theory," 15.

[93] Checkland and Poulter, *Learning for Action*, 6.

acknowledge this, but the author infers this to be the case considering the CAF does state it was developed for such purposes.

The strength of the ICAF is that it expands upon this shortcoming and does seek multiple perspectives from various partners involved in the assessment. As discussed earlier, dependent upon the nature of the assessment and amount of time allowed for it, the ICAF seeks multiple iterations with multiple participants in order to accurately capture both macro and micro level variables affecting the context of the environment in which the conflict exists. What is lacking in both the ICAF and the CAF are any models or tools to assist team members in developing synthesis of the information being developed or collected for each of the steps. The questions are a very useful tool to explore the multiple categories of potential causes of conflict, but without any models of the system or some other form or communication tool that explains the self-organizing properties of the actors or their relationships, it may prove to be very difficult for a team to develop shared understanding of the system or recognize the sources of conflict the assessment aims to identify.

## Conclusion

It is interesting that the ICAF is acknowledged in Army doctrine. In FM 3-07, *Stability Operations,* the Army devotes a whole appendix to the ICAF, but makes it clear that only doctrinal assessment tools are to be used to inform understanding, aid in planning, and shape execution.[94] The ICAF is only to be used to inform, but not replace, those doctrinal tools. While the entire appendix accurately describes the ICAF methodology, it does not provide any recommendations on how it might be useful for Army leaders or planners.

This research finds the two conceptual approaches both apply a systems perspective to understand complex operational environments but contrast significantly in their purpose and

[94] U.S. Army, Field Manual 3-07, Stability Operations, 143.

analytic construct. The ICAF's theoretical underpinnings and framework are useful for framing an operational environment, but design's array of multi-perspective cognitive tools provides for deeper systemic understanding by way of its heuristic thinking and learning approaches. But because both the ICAF and Army design share many similarities due to a common foundation in systems thinking, this study suggests that the two are compatible and integrating the ICAF into Army design can be very advantageous.

Having a common foundation in systems thinking, the ICAF and Army design provide Army planners with a common terminology with their interagency partners that will be useful in curtailing shortfalls in collaborative planning. A common terminology among interagency partners may also help streamline assessment efforts and create a more useful dialogue among planning partners and create a more productive learning environment. Even further, as more Army practitioners become familiar with the ICAF methodology, they may become more contributive to interagency assessments by understanding what information derived from Army doctrinal assessments is meaningful. Similarly, the more familiar the Army becomes with the ICAF, the more it can improve its ability to communicate with and draw upon the expertise of its interagency partners for designing and detailed planning for comprehensive, unified approach to operations.[95]

The ICAF is also supported by a number of appended questions that are based on numerous theories and quantitative studies that formulate a robust framework of ideas. Applying these questions during the course of the assessment helps the team develop causal explanations for conflict in any given country context or understand what needs to be "improved" in what Checkland describes as a situation that is "problematical."[96] This methodology and the supporting

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[95] James N. Mattis, "Memorandum for U.S. Joint Forces Command; Subject: Vision for a Joint Approach to Operational Design" (Norfolk: United States Joint Forces Command, 6 October 2009).

[96] Checkland and Poulter, *Learning for Action*, 3. Soft Systems Methodology describes situations where there are indicators that something needs to be done to change the current state of the situation as

framework of questions would be very useful to the Army design approach at the beginning construction of the environmental framing element.

The ICAF could serve as a common practical framework to build the design team or interagency team system of learning or design approach. One of the dangers of the ICAF is that the steps it follows could be considered an a priori set of categories and might lead a team towards trying to cram the environment (or system) they are observing into a pre-existing assessment tool. However, if used as what Bryan Lawson describes as a primary generator, the methodology and framework of questions would be very useful to generate large ideas that help an assessment team or design team identify focal points for further discussion and create discourse on new ideas that refine understanding.[97]

Another danger of the ICAF is that it lacks any tools or suggestions to map the environment. But melding the ICAF methodology into the design approach allows the team to harness the strength of its theoretical underpinnings and apply the numerous tools Army design adopts in order to capture the dynamics of a situation and surface the different worldviews of the team.[98] Furthermore, by way of design's heuristic techniques, like meta-questioning, an assessment team could able to use the discourse generated from the ICAF to produce alternative perspectives of the system being constructed. While the ICAF suggests that it does this, it does not offer any tools or suggestions that would indicate it does. In other words, the ICAF lacks any tools to warn or help prevent a team from describing or constructing an environment that is pre-

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"problematical." Instead of describing it as a problematical situation, which would indicate that the problem is defined, SSM describes it as problematical. The need to change the situation is evident, but what to do or how to do it is not. In this context, a situation that is problematical represents conflict in a region of the world that impacts or threatens U.S. national interests or security. What elements of U.S. national power or how they should be employed to change the current state of conflict in a given country context is not well defined.

[97] Bryan Lawson, *How Designers Think: The Design Process Demystified. 4th ed.* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1980, 2008), 46-47.

[98] Checkland and Poulter, *Learning for Action*, 25-27.

conceived vice trying to learn the logic behind the relational qualities of the environment that is more relevant to understanding the observed context.

Both the ICAF and design are flexible enough to conform to the specific conditions in which they might be utilized. While the ICAF may be incomplete, it has it strengths and shares many systems thinking perspectives with Army design. Because the Army is increasing its practice of involving more interagency partners as proximate designers and conversely, the Army is deploying planners to support interagency planning, melding the ICAF with Army design can provide a common framework or starting point that military and interagency partners can leverage in order to share knowledge, generate new concepts and develop more meaningful discourse to learn about and understand complex operational environments.

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